



Place-Name Commissions

Are they of any use?

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A south-eastward view, beyond the buildings of the now deserted Tarfessock Farm, to part of the 'Range of the Anful Hand'. The view straddles the boundary between Galloway and the Carrick division of Ayrshire, historically and topographically closely connected with Galloway. (Photo by Michael Ansell.) There is more about the place-names in and around this scene, on page 11.

Upper Coats (the successor to *Over Coats*). Although the directional affixes North and South do exist, they are found far less often than Easter or Wester. An earlier study by Dodgshon suggested this followed the Scandinavian *Solskifte* or sun-division system of land division: but my conclusion is that it has much more to do with topography. The general grain of the land and hillocks in central Scotland is east-west, and dividing a piece of land into Easter and Wester ensures both segments have a 'share' of the sunnier south-facing slopes and shadier north-facing slopes, which a north-south division would not. One of the few north-south pairs in the local area, North and South Medrox, lie on a plateau of igneous rock which bucks the grain of the land, thus affording both farms an equal share of sunny aspect. My study also found that the few north-south affixes were late-recorded names, and that South often lacked a North partner, suggesting that North - like Black discussed earlier - was an unattractive element. Affixes, as settlement names, are a dying breed, and of my sample of over 200 affixes recorded at various times, barely 35% remain in that form, many having reverted to the 'core' form (e.g. simple Gartmillan), partly as farms have amalgamated. The affix coinage seemed to reach its apogee in the 17th and 18th centuries, perhaps when improved farming technology and drainage allowed the fission of farms.



North and South Medrox farms, on their plateau

More detail on the Scots forms I have been discussing (as well as Gaelic and Brittonic forms) can be found in my PhD online (<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5270>), together with my data on the eight parishes studied. What I also hope is that members might consider how the

aspects of Scots place-names discussed above might apply to their own home area.

Pete Drummond (from his talk at the Coatbridge conference)

PLACE-NAME COMMISSIONS - ARE THEY OF ANY USE?

One of the big differences in onomastic governance between Scandinavia and the British Isles is seen in the attitude towards place-name authorisation. All the Nordic countries have central bodies appointed by the state to take care of or aid in establishing the correct spelling of place-names. In the British Isles, only a few of the national governments have set up place-name commissions. This difference ought to show up in how fixed place-name forms are in the British Isles as compared with Scandinavia - but do we see any difference? This article investigates the nature of place-name commissions and looks at the different functions and roles they play in different circumstances.

What is a place-name commission?

At first we have to establish what a place-name commission is. According to UNGEGN - United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names - a place-name commission (or geographical names commission in their terminology) is: "an independent body established or endorsed by a state in charge of establishing the correct spelling of geographical names nationally or internationally". By far the majority of place-name commissions deal with establishing correct place-name spellings at a national level. A notable exception is the only place-name commission in England, the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, whose area of responsibility concerns solely the correct English spelling of place-names outside of the UK.

Some place-name commissions act according to established law, such as is the case in Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Wales and Eire - whereas other work under departmental orders, like in Denmark (including the Regional language areas of Denmark, Faroe Islands and Greenland) Finland and the UK. In addition, many of the commissions have to deal with multiple languages, such as Norwegian, South Sami, North Sami and Kven (a Finnish dialect found only in Norway) in case of the place-name commission set up under the Norwegian Mapping Agency. Often the place-name commissions are associated an onomastic

research institution as is the case with the Danish Place-Name Commission (Stednavneudvalget), whose secretariat is permanently situated at the Name Research Section at Department of Nordic Research at University of Copenhagen. The commission is also obliged to have three members of staff from the Name Research Section present - of which one must be the commission's chairperson.

What are they used for, place-name commissions?

There are, broadly speaking, two uses of place-name commissions. On the one side they have the standardisation of place-names as their formal objective. However, there is no way around it that place-name commissions also function as political instruments of the state in some instances.

If we start with the formal objectives of place-name commissions (and although they differ between countries), then they generally work with standardising place-names - either according to established, national spelling conventions or to customary practice (or a combination of the two). Standardisation efforts usually result in a set of recommendations by the commissions which are then passed as standardised at government level. In some countries, the place-name commissions can even enforce standards on their own and decide what the correct spelling is without additional state approval.

Although this is normally one of the unspoken uses of place-name commissions, they are also very much tools of the state and occasionally used as political instruments. One of the most obvious ways in which place-name commissions can find usage is as a tool in the 'creation of a nation', i.e. nation building. Here a place-name commission can secure national consistency in a country's place-name material, either by means of enforcing a national standard - or, more problematically - 'dress up' place-names of other linguistic origins in one's own language and spelling conventions. In addition, a place-name commission can also facilitate the differentiation of place-name spellings from those of neighbouring countries of similar or close linguistic origins.

Fortunately, however, the main work of place-name commissions consists in securing consistency in spelling, thus creating a sense of uniformity - and making sure that unwanted forms do not creep into the national place-name

material. Occasionally, the place-name commissions are also supplied with the right to 'police' the place-name material - thus liberating the state from this (by the public often disliked) task.

What is the value of place-name commissions?

Place-name commissions mainly work to secure consistency. This can, however, also be ensured without a formal institution. The task then usually rests with the national mapping agencies who will have to carry out the standardisation work from established conventions and spelling regulations, etc. This has worked relatively successfully in e.g. England and Scotland. It is thus a valid question to pose if place-name commissions are worth the effort?

One major advantage a formally established place-name commission holds over, say a national mapping agency's standardisation unit, is the possibility to involve more relevant institutions and experts in the standardisation work - thus enabling a higher quality of output. At the same time a nationally endorsed standard is also easier to enforce at an international level also. So all in all, place-name commissions must be considered to be worth their value - after all.

Peder Gammeltoft (from his talk at Coatbridge)

An upgraded version of the online Scots Language Dictionary / *Dictionar o the Scots Leid* was launched on 12 September 2014. It has a clearer layout than before, besides fuller search facilities, and is an indispensable aid to anyone working with Scots place-names.

www.dsl.ac.uk

PLACE-NAMES IN GLENSHEE

The Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust under the leadership of David Strachan recently undertook an archaeological dig near the settlement of Lair in Glenshee PER. As part of an evaluation of the surrounding landscape I executed a preliminary place-name survey to complement the archaeological project. The survey area incorporated the watershed of the Shee Water from roughly Spittal of Glenshee to Persie, about 2 km north of Bridge of Cally, and was laid out on approximately the same lines as the *Place-names of Fife* series. It was hoped that the survey might show up Pictish place-names since